



Mr Reid Armstrong
Chairman, Hydebank Wood Prison
& Young Offenders Centre 2005-06



Mr Joe Mitchell
Chairman, Magilligan Prison 2005-06



Mr James McAllister
Chairman, Maghaberry Prison

The reports for the Independent Monitoring Boards for Northern Ireland Prisons, for the period 1st April 2005 – 31st March 2006 have today been published. While the reports are compiled separately and submitted by the chair of each board to the Secretary of State, there are a number of common themes.

On Healthcare the Boards have again raised concerns over the ability of the Prison Service to deal with the challenges presented by for inmates with mental health problems. James McAllister – chair of the Maghaberry Board on this issue has said **“it cannot be right that people are returned to society without taking advantage of this opportunity to intervene appropriately and sufficiently. I do hope that the transfer of lead responsibility for prisoner healthcare to the HPSS at 1 April will provide the opportunity for this to be addressed robustly on a multi-agency basis”**.

On Resettlement the Boards have highlighted the important work that is done in terms of resettlement and rehabilitation of prisoners across the prison estate. In view of the importance placed on this work they are however calling upon the Prison Service to allocate more resources to it. The Chair of the Magilligan Board for the reporting period Joe Mitchell

has commented **“Resettlement planning is key to ensuring that those people who are committed to prison by the courts eventually reintegrate back into society with a real sense of purpose. For this reason we are calling upon the Prison Service to ensure that every prisoner has a resettlement plan and that there are sufficient job places available for all prisoners who require them.”**

On the Prison Estate the Boards have welcomed the strategic review being taken forward by the Prison Service but have again highlighted concerns in a number of areas: the Magilligan Board have called upon the Service to maintain a facility based on the present site as it feels that many of the community based initiatives may otherwise be lost; in Maghaberry the Board have again raised the issue of the under-capacity of the kitchen and have called for its early replacement; and at Hydebank Wood the Board have again recommended that a custom-built prison be provided for women and that a strategic plan be produced for the long term accommodation needs at that location. The Chair of the Board at Hydebank Wood for the reporting period Reid Armstrong said of the estate **“If the trend of an increasing prison population continues the overcrowding problem will**

become much more serious. On the particular issue of Women prisoners we have welcomed the developments in Hydebank Wood over the past year but we again stress the need for a dedicated women’s facility in Northern Ireland”.

At the issue of today’s reports the chair of the Council of Independent Monitoring Boards Vilma Patterson paid tribute to all of the Independent members

“I would like to thank all of the Independent members for their dedication to this work all of which is done on a voluntary basis. The important work of the members in satisfying themselves as to the decent and just treatment of prisoners and to the range and quality of programmes preparing them for release, is done on behalf of society to ensure a humane prison system.”